AUGUST 1994 $1.25 US $1.70 CAN 01583

MARVEL Age 139

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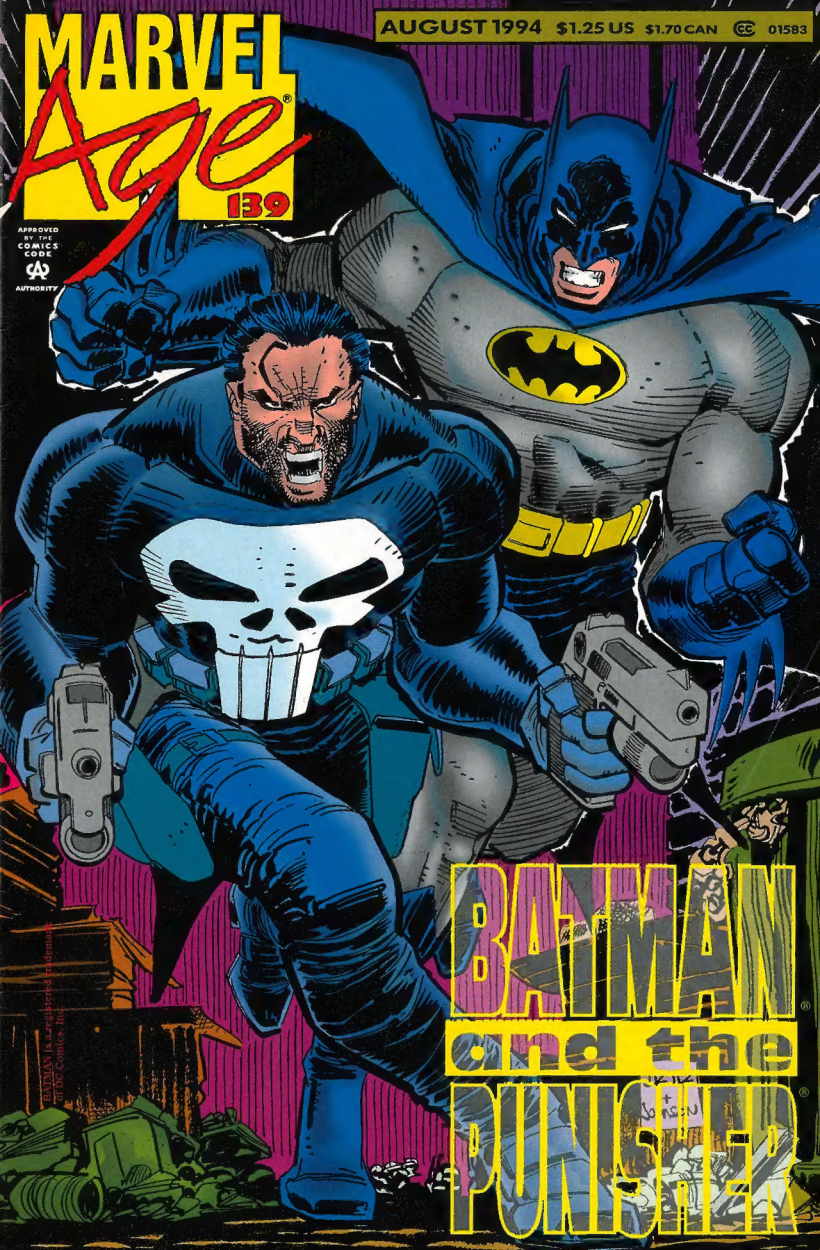

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PENULTIMATE EDITORIAL

Next issue is the last of MARVEL AGE.

Why? Simple—falling sales. As of this writing (in late April), the comic book marketplace is going through a dramatic realignment, and amidst the chaos we've found that, despite the fact that AGE has been *selling out* in many stores, orders have been dropping.

There's a lot of slick competition out there. And even with our efforts to make our magazine a quality, thought-provoking, and fun package, we never completely shook the stigma of being considered a "company vehicle."

We weren't *forced* to suspend publication—it was an editorial decision, not an economically-driven one. We've got a top-notch group of reporters, writers, and designers still eager to entertain and inform our readers (that's you). It was our decision to strike out in *new* directions, to give these talented folks the chance to reach a larger audience.

So we're not disappearing. In the coming months we have quite a few surprises still up our sleeves.

What surprises, you ask? That would be telling . . .

In the meanwhile, we're going to have some fun in our last issues. It's not every day that we get to have Superman, Batman, and Archie all appear in one Marvel mag. And with all of the multi-media madness in our universe of late, we're getting to play in just about every back-yard you could imagine.

Come enjoy with us.

—Steve Saffel

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MARVEL AGE® Vol. 1, No. 139, August, 1984. (ISSN #8750-4367) Published by MARVEL COMICS, Terry Stewart, President; Stan Lee, Publisher; Michael Hobson, Group Vice President, Publishing. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. **SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, N.Y. AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES.** Published monthly.

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Up Front

MYTH CONCEPTIONS

The Incredible Hulk is headed for a downfall, and the return of Agamemnon may or *may not* save him.

Agamemnon, who has been absent from the **INCREDIBLE HULK** since issue #401, will return in issue #421 (on sale in July) as a three-part story arc entitled "Myth Conceptions". The story centers around the Pantheon's determination to take revenge on Agamemnon for selling them out to the Troyjans in issue #416. The Pantheon try to convince The Hulk to aid them in their quest, but the green hero has mixed feelings. He feels loyal to Agamemnon, who chose The Hulk as the leader of the international group.

But The Hulk will decide that his loyalty ultimately lies with the Pantheon and will accompany the crew to Asgard. Agamemnon will ultimately be brought to trial for his crimes.

According to Editor Bobbie Chase, the events that follow that threat will change the **INCREDIBLE HULK**'s status quo forever. She elaborated, "Things are going to change *drastically* for The Hulk. Peter [David] really constructed the whole thing very nicely." Well, perhaps not *too* nicely. Along the way, The Hulk and The Pantheon will battle not only Agamemnon, but the Frost Giants, as well."

Issues #424 and #425 will be milestones in the **INCREDIBLE HULK** saga, with issue #425 a forty-eight page special.

A GIANT AMONG US

George Pèrez will handle the *writing* end of **GIANT MAN**, a special four-issue limited series that will actually be *attached* to its parent title **THE AVENGERS** beginning in August.

Pèrez, who is famous for his artwork for *The New Teen Titans*, **HULK: FUTURE IMPERFECT** and **SACHS & VIOLENS**, is doing his first writing for Marvel with this project (previous writing credits include a revamp of *Wonder Woman*). Pèrez will also provide all four covers.

"The series will have a lot of flavor of the old horror films of the 1950's," Editor Richard Ashford said. "It'll be similar also to the science fiction comics Stan Lee and Jack Kirby used to do, but it'll be contemporary." Regarding the tempestuous romance between Hank Pym (Giant Man) and Janet Van Dyne (The Wasp), Group Editor Ralph Macchio added, "Hank and Jan will be back together again. I *do* love a happy ending."

GIANT MAN will be penciled by Jeff Moore, whose credits include **AVENGERS STRIKE FILES** and **WARLOCK**. It will be bound to **THE AVENGERS #379-382** as a "flip book," and those double-size specials will be priced at $2.50.

STAR FIGHTERS BLAST OFF

The "Cosmic Powers" editorial office announced that **STAR FIGHTERS**, a new ongoing series, is planned to begin in August. Written by Mark Gruenwald — **QUASAR** writer and architect of the recent **STARBLAST** crossover — the series launches with the total annihilation of a galactic peacekeeping force similar to Earth's United Nations.

When planet Earth is falsely accused of destroying the galactic UN, Quasar forms The Star Fighters, an interstellar team, whose first mission is to prove the human race's innocence. The Silver Surfer, Beta Ray Bill, the Rigellian known as Tana Nile, Cloud-Nine, and other cosmic-class heavyweights will climb aboard to help fight for Quasar's cause.

Editor Craig Anderson promised that **STAR FIGHTERS** will give readers new insight into the relationships between the heroes: "This book will give us a chance to see how a lot of our spacefaring characters work — or don't work — together," he hinted.

STAR FIGHTERS will be penciled by Scot (**COSMIC POWERS #6**) Eaton and inked by Bob (**WARLOCK AND THE INFINITY WATCH**) Almond.

DOUBLE VISION

A four-issue limited series centered around the **AVENGERS** synthezoid member The Vision is scheduled to begin in August, with **AVENGERS** scribe Bob Harras on board to write the adventure. At press time the art team was as yet undetermined.

The series will pit The Vision against the *alternate* Vision (from The Gatherers). The evil synthezoid will attempt to destroy his counterpart. "The series will also review The Vision's relationship with women," Editor Ralph Macchio said. "With Bob Harras at the helm, it's a very strong and poignant story."

CODE: BLUE

In a four-issue **CODE: BLUE** limited series scheduled to begin in August the **S.W.A.T.** team from **THUNDERSTRIKE** will have a weighty mission on its hands: to stop a maniacal Doombot (a robotic Dr. Doom doppelganger) from destroying New York City.

To complicate matters, local politicians who resent having to pay the team for its services will conspire to disband Code: Blue. And, in between battles with the Doombot and the mayor's office, the special tactical team will face both The Thermal Man and The Wrecker.

CODE: BLUE will be written by Roy Thomas, best known for his work for **CONAN THE ADVENTURER**, **AVENGERS**, and **UNCANNY X-MEN**. Larry Alexander will pencil the series.

As a unique format turnabout, **CODE: BLUE** will be released *attached* to its parent title. Readers have but to flip over each double-sized, $2.50 issue of **THUNDERSTRIKE** (issues #13-16) in order to find each installment of the special limited series.

HYPERKIND AND ECTOKID RIDE AGAIN!

Two 48-page specials based on the **HYPERKIND** and **ECTOKID** series are planned for the summer and, according to Editor Marc McLaurin, "These are dramatic stories that will change the characters' lives and, at the same time, establish *all* that has happened before."

Written by Fred Burke with art by Fabio (*not* the model, but described by McLaurin as "an amazing new artist"), the **HYPERKIND** special will arrive in stores at the end of July. In the book, the Hyperkind super heroes will explore whether they are holding onto their powers at the expense of another world.

ECTOKID will be written by **PUNISHER** scribes Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning, with Hector Gomez handling the penciling chores. The book will center around the Kid's revenge on his mother's murderers. **ECTOKID** will ship in August.

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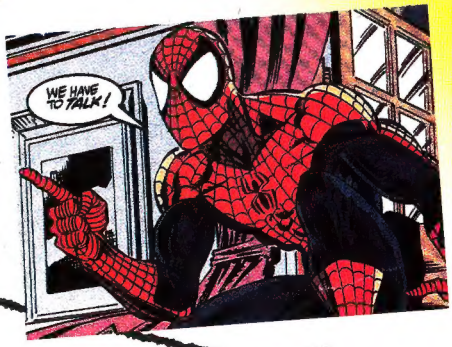


OZ AND POP SHOTS

Oz, the gift company known for their merchandise featuring Gary Larsen's famous comic strip *The Far Side*, will create a series of 56 greeting cards incorporating characters from throughout the Marvel Universe and its history. The selection will include a full spectrum of cards from "Thank You's" to "Happy Birthday's."

They will also produce six coffee mugs utilizing classic character art by some of Marvel's most popular artists, including Sal Buscema's *Spider-Man*, Jim Lee's *X-Men*, Ron Lim's *The Thing*, and Dale Keown's *Hulk*. According to Marvel Consumer Products Manager Wendi Daniels, they will be available in July. These gift experts will also produce a page-a-day desk calendar for 1995, which will feature Marvel trivia and full-color illustrations.

Daniels also announced that *Pop Shots*, the folks who have created many deluxe pop-up greeting cards featuring famous characters from The Little Mermaid to the stars of *Gone With the Wind*, will produce new deluxe *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* birthday cards, scheduled to arrive in stores in June. Custom designed by Pop Shots, they will be inked by Scott Koblish (**X-MEN**) and Scott Hanna (**SPIDER-MAN**), with painted colors by Paul Mounts.

Stan's SOAP BOX

Hi, Heroes!

Naturally, the whole world's talking about the Punisher/Batman crossover comic — the whole comic book world, at any rate!

Therefore, exercising his best editorial judgment by electing to jump on a red-hot topic while the jumping's good, **MARVEL AGE's** Sagacious Steve Saffel asked if I would jot down any memories I might have of the very first Marvel/DC crossover, the one which featured our now-legendary Spider-Man/Superman saga by Gerry Conway, Ross Andru, and Dick Giordano. Well, you know me — ever willing to cooperate and oblige, I said I'd be more than happy to address that most momentous subject, especially after Steve stopped twisting my arm and threatening to take my name off the masthead!

Our original Spidey/Superman crossover began as an act of desperation. We really wanted to do a *movie* featuring both the web-swinger and the man of steel, but we couldn't because we learned that Warner Brothers had already begun work on the first *Superman* feature film.

Still feeling that a team-up of two such world-famous characters would be sensationally successful, we didn't want to let the idea die, so we finally figured, "Hey, why not do it as a comicbook?" And that's when the problems started!

You wouldn't believe the arguments and debates that ensued between Marvel and DC concerning which name should be displayed first on the masthead! (Or, knowing how important these heroes are to each company, you probably *would* believe it.) We finally settled the burning issue by putting the name "Superman" first, but putting it on the very same level as the name "Spider-Man", and by putting Spidey himself in the foreground of the cover illustration.

At any rate, the next problem was getting a story that would satisfy both companies. If our two heroes were to *fight*, we wouldn't let Superman win, and DC wouldn't let Spider-Man win. So, we had to figure out a way to make it seem as if they were both winners.

Then came the problem of panels. Can you just picture the squabbling as each editor from each company would count the panels and shout at the other editor, "Hey, wait a minute! You've drawn Spidey in four more panels than Superman!" "Maybe so, but your artist made Superman bigger in his panels, and that's not fair to Spider-Man!" I tell ya, it was a competitive nightmare!

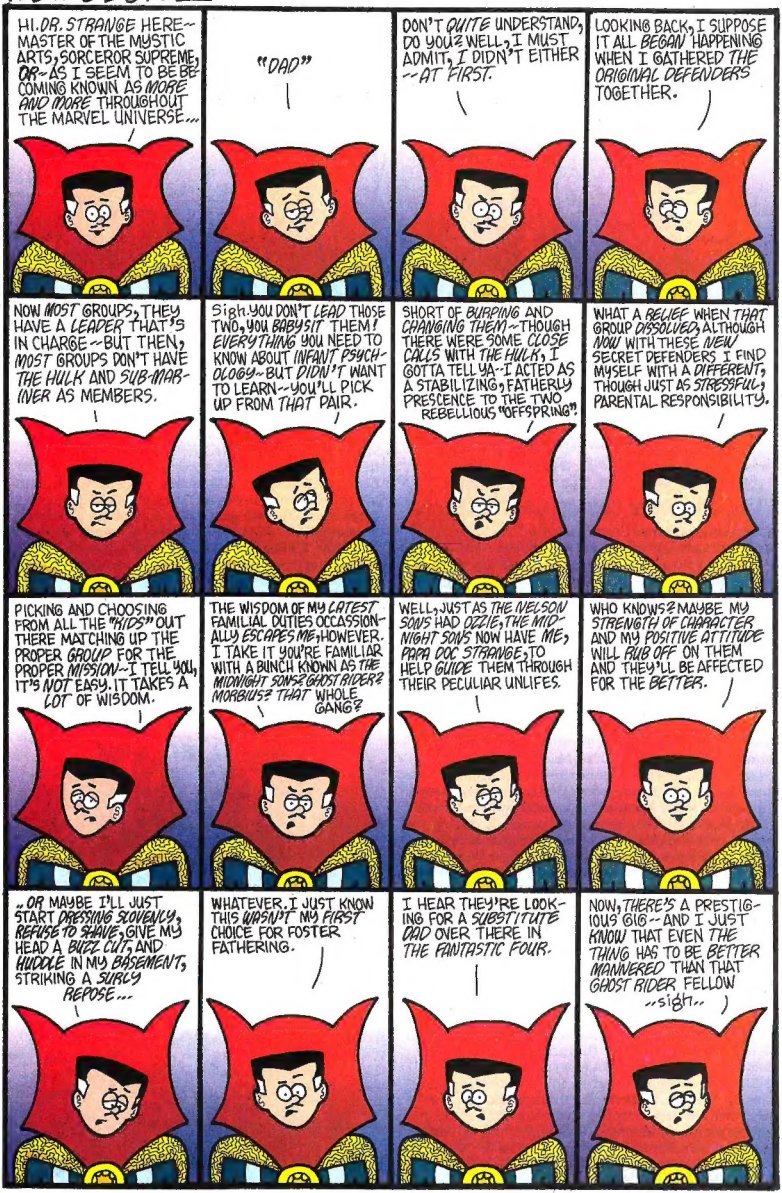
But every story, no matter how grim, can have a happy ending. Despite all the problems, the book was finally completed and both Carmine Infantino, who was DC's head honcho at the time and I (since I hadn't yet moved to California) ended up being totally pleased with the result. That historical issue, the first crossover book between two rival companies, was one of comicdom's biggest sellers and is still mentioned with great affection by the old-time readers who were lucky enough to have bought a copy.

So here's your chance to be part of history-in-the-making once again. I'm referring, of course, to the pandemonious Punisher/Batman crossover. Or, as Caesar himself might have said, *"Quot homines, tot sententiae!"*

Excelsior!

Stan Lee

HEMBECK


HI. DR. STRANGE HERE~ MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS, SORCEROR SUPREME, OR~AS I SEEM TO BE BECOMING KNOWN AS MORE AND MORE THROUGHOUT THE MARVEL UNIVERSE...
"DAD"
DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND, DO YOU? WELL, I MUST ADMIT, I DIDN'T EITHER --AT FIRST.
LOOKING BACK, I SUPPOSE IT ALL BEGAN HAPPENING WHEN I GATHERED THE ORIGINAL DEFENDERS TOGETHER.
NOW MOST GROUPS, THEY HAVE A LEADER THAT'S IN CHARGE~BUT THEN, MOST GROUPS DON'T HAVE THE HULK AND SUB-MARINER AS MEMBERS.
Sigh. YOU DON'T LEAD THOSE TWO, YOU BABYSIT THEM! EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INFANT PSYCHOLOGY~BUT DIDN'T WANT TO LEARN--YOU'LL PICK UP FROM THAT PAIR.
SHORT OF BURPING AND CHANGING THEM~THOUGH THERE WERE SOME CLOSE CALLS WITH THE HULK, I GOTTA TELL YA~I ACTED AS A STABILIZING, FATHERLY PRESCENCE TO THE TWO REBELLIOUS "OFFSPRING".
WHAT A RELIEF WHEN THAT GROUP DISSOLVED, ALTHOUGH NOW WITH THESE NEW SECRET DEFENDERS I FIND MYSELF WITH A DIFFERENT, THOUGH JUST AS STRESSFUL, PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY.
PICKING AND CHOOSING FROM ALL THE "KIDS" OUT THERE MATCHING UP THE PROPER GROUP FOR THE PROPER MISSION~I TELL YOU, IT'S NOT EASY. IT TAKES A LOT OF WISDOM.
THE WISDOM OF MY LATEST FAMILIAL DUTIES OCCASSIONALLY ESCAPES ME, HOWEVER. I TAKE IT YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH A BUNCH KNOWN AS THE MIDNIGHT SONS? GHOST RIDER? MORBIUS? THAT WHOLE GANG?
WELL, JUST AS THE NELSON SONS HAD OZZIE, THE MIDNIGHT SONS NOW HAVE ME, PAPA DOC STRANGE, TO HELP GUIDE THEM THROUGH THEIR PECULIAR UNLIFES.
WHO KNOWS? MAYBE MY STRENGTH OF CHARACTER AND MY POSITIVE ATTITUDE WILL RUB OFF ON THEM AND THEY'LL BE AFFECTED FOR THE BETTER.
...OR MAYBE I'LL JUST START DRESSING SLOVENLY, REFUSE TO SHAVE, GIVE MY HEAD A BUZZ CUT, AND HUDDLE IN MY BASEMENT, STRIKING A SURLY REPOSE...
WHATEVER. I JUST KNOW THIS WASN'T MY FIRST CHOICE FOR FOSTER FATHERING.
I HEAR THEY'RE LOOKING FOR A SUBSTITUTE DAD OVER THERE IN THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
NOW, THERE'S A PRESTIGIOUS 616--AND I JUST KNOW THAT EVEN THE THING HAS TO BE BETTER MANNERED THAN THAT GHOST RIDER FELLOW
..sigh..

MAXIMUM CARNAGE

PAINTING THE SCREEN RED

Punch, punch...kick...web... Kick... punch... power hit... (Carrion is out, but Spider-man is down to half of his life points.) Uh, oh...here comes CARNAGE...

Last summer Marvel Comics released the 14-part "Maximum Carnage" crossover in the Spider-Man titles. In its pages Spider-Man reluctantly teamed up with Venom and a vast array of guest stars to halt the demonic rampage of Carnage, Shriek, Demogoblin, Doppleganger, and Carrion.

This summer Acclaim Entertainment is releasing the 16 bit *Maximum Carnage* video game for both the Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo home entertainment systems.

Acclaim Entertainment is the largest independent publisher of interactive software in the world. Some of their more popular titles include *The World Wrestling Federation*, *The Simpsons*, *Terminator 2*, *NBA Jam*, *Mortal Kombat*, and, of course, Marvel titles. "Our very first (Marvel license) was *Wolverine* for the original Nintendo Entertainment system. We also have our lineup of Spider-Man cartridges for the Gameboy system, as well as *Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge*," said Dan Harnett, assistant manager of public relations for Acclaim. Acclaim is also the owner of Voyager Communications, publisher of the Valiant line of comic books.

Maximum Carnage is a fighting game with a 3/4 screen perspective — when a player looks at the screen they are seeing the game play from a 45 degree angle, as if they were leaning out of a second story window to observe the action taking place in the street. This allows the player to walk "in and out" of the screen, as well as side to side, giving the game a three-dimensional feel.

Associate Producer Tyrone Miller of Acclaim, who is responsible for the look and feel of the game (in essence the "editor") noted, "I was trying to make the game different from most games. I had the rare opportunity to use two characters here, and not just one. I tried to turn it into two different games that are interlocking. You start out as Spider-Man and you play through the first few levels. After you clear those first levels you have the opportunity to play as Spider-Man *or* Venom. There are levels specific to each character. That means that the best way to complete certain levels is to be Spider-Man and on other levels it is better to be Venom."

Thus, a player will have four specific options: "You can play as Spider-Man all the way through the game or after a certain point you can play Venom all the way through," he elaborated. "You can also play the game half Spider-Man or half Venom and *vice versa*. Depending on which of these options you chose, you are going to get a very different game. The 'non-player' characters have different reactions depending on which character is in play. This is a new idea as far as games are concerned and I tried to incorporate as much of it as possible into the game."

Miller is an avid comic book reader and counts the Spider-Man titles among his regular reading. This enabled him to design the game with an understanding of the characters and create what he feels is a richer play environment for fans of the story line.

"The two characters approach things differently," he observed. "Venom has his own value system and Spider-Man has a completely different one. I tried to incorpo-

rate that into the game and accurately represent each character's personality.

"Spider-Man is very honor bound, very cautious about the cause and effects of all his actions. Venom has more of an attitude like, 'as long as I reach my goal I don't care how I go about doing it.' I tried to make that a part of the game. There are places where Venom will just go right up the middle, where Spider-Man would have to use some strategy to avoid hurting innocent bystanders," he continued. "For example there is a point in the game where innocent people in a hypnotic daze try to attack Spider-Man. He knows that they are not operating under their own volition and doesn't want to hurt them. He would climb up a building, swing over them, or web them up, but not injure them."

A player controlling Spider-Man would find that he would *lose* energy if he tried to hurt innocent people. On the other hand, a player controlling Venom could mow right through the crowd without any adverse effects on his energy level. "We incorporated all the cameos from the comic into the video game and tried to have these characters react differently to Spider-Man and Venom. There are eight of them, and they each do two different things. The characters making cameos are; Cloak, Dagger, Captain America, Firestar, Morbius, Iron Fist, Deathlok, and the Black Cat," he revealed.

Players can't actually use these eight characters but instead can pick up a "cameo icon" lying on the play field and summon the character for a short time. Whether Spider-Man or Venom picks up the icon will determine the behavior of the new character. An example of this is the Dagger cameo. If Spider-Man picks up the Dagger icon, she will touch Spider-Man and restore health points that have been lost in battle. If Venom picks up the cameo she appears and shoots light daggers at all the villains on the screen.

"Just continually fighting can get repetitious, so I tried to incorporate a variety of features to keep players interested," Miller continued. "As I said earlier there are four different paths that the player can take through the game, all Spidey, all Venom, etc. and depending on which way you play, you're going to get a different game."

Players can expect the full range of maneuvers from the two protagonists; punching, kicking, webbing, jumping, and swinging; but if a player expects to get through the game relying on the same move Miller has a surprise in store for them. Repeatedly using one move — such as punching — to the exclusion of others will make that maneuver less effective over the course of the game. Additionally Spider-Man and Venom have a capability called a "power hit". This is a special burst of power built up by meeting certain requirements. As of this writing, Miller said he planned that acquiring the power hit would require using the full range of moves at the player's disposal.

"What I want people to do is use all the moves. I don't want you to be able to go through the game and just punch. The characters do a lot of different kicks, a lot of web moves, and there are some special moves in there for each character. What's the use of playing the game if you don't use all of these things?" he posed.

He also warned that the game is still in the play testing stage and things may change by the games release this summer.

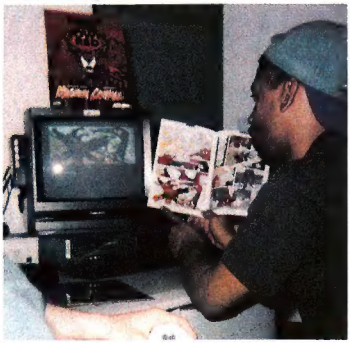
Miller and the other designers of the game were able to remain almost completely faithful to the story line, "I'd say about 85 per cent of what was in the comic made it into the game. The reason for this is there are scenes that were lacking action and did not transfer well to the game format. I had to step in and exercise a little editorial license, but it pretty much sticks to the actual story."

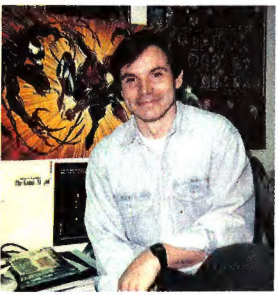
Players can definitely expect to do battle with Carnage, Demogoblin, Shriek, Doppleganger, and Carrion. Traditionally in video game play, primary villains are encountered at the end of each stage and known as "stage bosses." The player fights a horde of faceless villains until a sufficient number of them are destroyed. At this point the stage boss comes out to fight the presumably weakened player. The player clears the stage when (and if) they defeat the stage boss, advancing to the next level, never to see the villain again.

"I tried to change that completely because throughout the comics, which we were trying to stay true to. . .these characters are around. You fight them once and then you have to fight them again and then you have to fight them again," Miller said. "So I had to put a lot of twists on what normally goes on in a fighting game. We had a specific path that the game had to follow. It had to have things happen in it that traditionally don't occur in video games.

"What I want people to do is use all the moves."

"I have stacks and stacks of comics at home and so much information cluttered in my mind that I thought was useless," he continued. "Then this particular opportunity came along suddenly it was all very valuable to me in trying to make a video game that would be exciting to both comic book fans and to game players who have never read Spider-Man before."





Top: As the game's Associate Producer, Tyrone Miller carefully compares each on-screen likeness with the character's original comic book renderings. **Left:** Product Manager Bob Picunko must know the game inside and out, and participates in the promotions, advertising, and product positioning. **Bottom:** Venom decks a foe in a sample game screen. **Right:** In this screen, drawn carefully from the original comic book art, Carnage lives up to his name

This was not the first time Acclaim utilized Miller's comic book expertise. During the design process of *Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge* for the Super Nintendo, the designers frequently went to him for background information and reference about the characters, and for answers about what would and wouldn't work. He was asked about Wolverine's healing factor and how to integrate it into the game, how his claws work and what he does with them when they aren't in use. Although he had input in designing the game, his involvement was mostly passive. *Maximum Carnage* is the first chance he's had to put his knowledge of comics to use in designing a game.

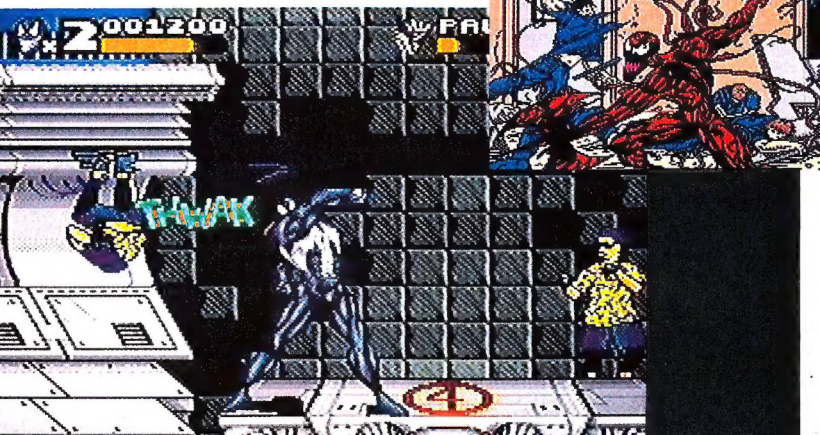
One of the touches that Miller thinks fans of the "Maximum Carnage" epic are going to enjoy is the use of actual artwork from the comics in between the stages. The artwork was animated in a style reminiscent of the old *Marvel Super Heroes* television show. "Rather than use text to connect two levels — remember, 'a picture is worth a thousand words' — we would find a good scene to use and lay it over a scanner. Then we would scan that particular page right into the program," Miller said.

With more than 25 levels planned, fans can expect to see a lot of artwork. "There were 14 comic books, and in each one there were up to three significant events. We tried to make each event something special, something unique. That's how come it ended up having so many levels," Miller added.

Fans familiar with the storyline will find the same settings they read about last summer, with at least two exceptions: "Nintendo wouldn't let us put a church in the game. Cloak and Dagger operate out of a church, so we had to get around that. There is one scene at the end that takes place in a cemetery, and we had to try to stay away from that as well."

When the game comes out this summer, buyers need not look any further than the comic book store. A limited edition exclusive to the direct market is being produced by Acclaim, which will contain the game, three collectors' pins, and a leatherette bound Carnage comic. Other "Maximum Carnage" merchandise out this summer will include T-shirts, caps, pins, a limited edition Carnage watch, and a trade paperback collection of the 14-part comic book crossover, for maximum entertainment.

– *Brian David Marshall*



MARVEL MOVIE ROUNDUP

Producer **Gale Anne Hurd** *(Aliens, Terminator 2, No Escape)* has agreed to take on *The Incredible Hulk.*
Photo: Jim Townley

You can already picture the puns in the Hollywood trade headlines: 'HULK' IS A GREEN LIGHT FOR 'T2' PRODUCER. "Green light" is filmspeak for saying that a movie project has gotten the go-ahead to start production. And *The Incredible Hulk*, which is being shepherded to the screen by *Terminator*'s Gale Anne Hurd, is one of three Marvel projects steadily nearing this stage.

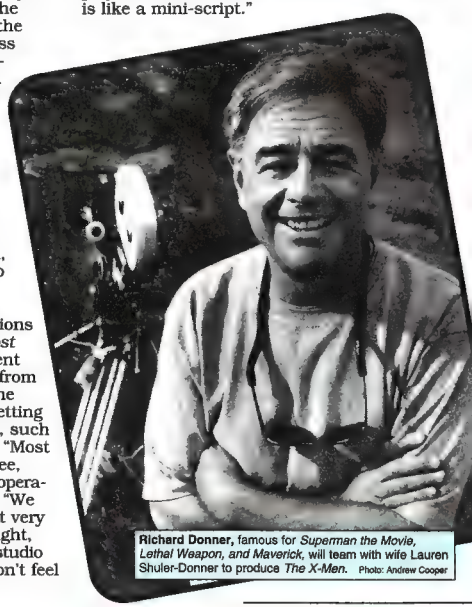
The X-Men and *Blade* have joined the green-skinned goliath in marching to the head of the Marvel movie pack. At press time, those involved with each production were optimistic that they'd have a solid script in hand by early summer.

The first draft is already in on *Blade*, which will be directed by former Spike Lee cinematographer Ernest Dickerson (*Juice, Surviving the Game*). A self-professed horror maven currently at work on a *Tales From the Crypt* feature film, Dickerson noted, "Vampires have become too much of [the] romantic figure. In the old fiction, Dracula was a monster. We want to go back to that viciousness, to vampires being scary and not romantic."

A bit farther off are big-screen versions of *Spider-Man, The Black Panther, Ghost Rider*, and *Cage*. Admittedly, the current development picture is quite different from what was reported a year ago, when the newly formed Marvel Films was just getting into gear, but as Stan Lee pointed out, such shifts in momentum are to be expected. "Most of this depends on the scripts," said Lee, who's overseeing Marvel's production operation with CEO and Chairman Avi Arad. "We have studios ready to do the movies, but very often the studio feels the script isn't right, and it goes back for a rewrite. Or the studio may like the script, but we at Marvel don't feel it's quite the way it should be done. This is the thing that takes the longest. Once scripts are approved, then we'll really start getting into high gear."

So while Wesley Snipes continues to express interest in playing Prince T'Challa, a *Black Panther* screenplay hasn't yet been nailed down. Neither has *Cage*, though the project has drawn a commitment from Producer Ed Pressman, whose credits include *Conan the Barbarian* and the adaptation of James O'Barr's comic, *The Crow*.

As for James Cameron's *Spider-Man*, the writer-director of the *Terminator* saga and *Aliens* has spent much of '94 spinning *True Lies* with Arnold Schwarzenegger. After a much needed break, Cameron has now returned to his word processor to devote some more attention to Peter Parker, Avi Arad noted. "Cameron has finished a treatment, not a script," Arad said, referring to the story synopses which precede all screenplays. But, he added, "a Cameron treatment is like a mini-script."



Richard Donner, famous for *Superman the Movie, Lethal Weapon, and Maverick,* will team with wife Lauren Shuler-Donner to produce *The X-Men.* Photo: Andrew Cooper

Ernest Dickerson, seen here on the set of *Surviving the Game*, will direct *Blade*.
Photo: D. Stevens

Who'll be the actor rattling off Spider-Man's witticisms is yet in question. With the exception of *The Black Panther*, Marvel's casting discussions continue to be limited at this point. Still, Lee knows, when the time does come to begin talking names, Marvel Films is likely to be put under a microscope.

"Anytime a book is translated to the screen, there are going to be some people who say, 'Gee, I didn't think this character would look like that,'" Lee said. "You can't help that. Some people may think of Professor X looking like Yul Brynner, others may think of him looking like Harrison Ford. However, I will say this: We're trying to keep these movies as close to the books as possible, and I think if you do a good feature film that doesn't violate any of the principles of the book itself, then people will be happy with it."

This sentiment is seconded by Lauren Shuler-Donner, who is producing *X-Men* with her husband, Richard Donner, director of the *Lethal Weapon* series and the original Superman movie. The fierce protectiveness readers feel toward Wolverine, Cyclops, and the rest makes this one of the trickiest Marvel properties to adapt. Thus, the Donners aim to tap *precisely* those elements that inspire reader devotion. "I think it'll be accessible for everybody," Shuler-Donner said of the screenplay — in early stages of being crafted by Andrew Kevin Walker (*Tales From the Crypt*). "It's got rich, complex characters that you can get involved with, real jeopardy, and an exciting story. Whether you know the comic or not, it'll be a good story."

Given that the Marvel storylines slated for the screen have a scope of 20 to 30 years, "to-the-letter" adaptations become a narrative impossibility, so producers plan to start with the basics, weaving in contemporary elements wherever there's a logical opening or need. *The Hulk*, for one, will have a very traditional slant, with Bruce Banner reverting to the form of his mindless, monstrous, gamma-bombed past. "We're really going back to the origin of the comic book," said Tom Craig, a Universal Pictures development executive overseeing the film.

"Most of the movies will have an origin portion, though I don't know that I'd call them origin stories," Lee added. "But you can't *have* a super hero without telling his origin."

As screenwriter on both *Blade* and *Ghost Rider*, David S. Goyer has found himself dealing with the ever-growing complexity of the Blaze-Ketch-Badilino mythos, and he has set out to streamline Ghost Rider for movie goers, once again lighting a fire under Johnny Blaze. "We're going to have Zarathos... come into Blaze's body first," Goyer explained. "Blaze is able to evict him, just as he did in the book, but in the process he sets him loose on Earth. In order to go after Zarathos, he allows the Spirit of Vengeance into his body. So it's really a combination of the two books. The look and feel of it is going to be from the new series, but the core is going to come from the original."

"We want to go back to that viciousness, to vampires being scary and not romantic."

Blade, meanwhile, allows Goyer and Dickerson greater freedoms. "Blade is someone who always came in and out of the Marvel world but was never really shown in the spotlight," said Producer Peter Frankfurt, who previously teamed with Dickerson on *Juice*. "He's a cool character who Marvel aficionados know about but haven't really been able to feast on. That really appealed to us."

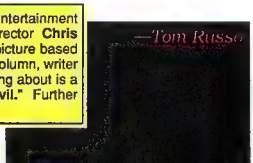
"We actually fused a little bit of the stuff from MORBIUS into Blade, in that he truly is half vampire and he does get that thirst,"

said Goyer, who affectionately refers to his hero as "Shaft with a stake."

"One advantage I have over non-fan screenwriters is that I'm aware of all the other Marvel characters," he continued. "I was aware of Morbius's problem and said, 'Oh, that would work kind of well for Blade.' We wanted him to have something that he was always struggling with, so there's always the potential that he could be turned to the other side."

The opticals at Goyer's disposal are eye-popping. Because Frankfurt is part of the R/Greenberg Associates special effects house, cutting-edge technology has been an integral part of the project from the outset. The resulting innovations include a technique for editing out blinks and other eye movements, allowing the filmmakers to fully capture a vampire's eerie, soulless stare. Frankfurt noted, "David is having script meetings with people whose sole responsibility in the movie world is to come up with things you *haven't* seen."

Bulletin: As MARVEL AGE went to press, the entertainment trade publication *Daily Variety* announced that director **Chris Columbus** (*Home Alone*) will direct a major motion picture based on the man without fear. In his May 19, 1994 "Dish" column, writer Michael Fleming noted "...the project everyone's talking about is a feature about the Marvel Comics superhero **Daredevil.**" Further details were pending at press time.



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Franklin Richards, now known as Psi-Lord, will take up his father's mantle and lead a new—albeit very different—group comprised of the futuristic she-warrior Huntara, Kismet (from the pages of QUASAR), and two *new* characters, a Wakandan known as Vibraxas, and an as-yet unnamed representative of the mysterious race of The Inhumans.

Thus, in August, a monthly comic book series spun off from FANTASTIC FOUR will make its debut. FANTASTIC FORCE will be penciled by *Justice Machine* and AVENGERS: TERMINATRIX OBJECTIVE illustrator Mike Gustovich, inked by Don Hudson, with a permanent series writer still to be chosen at press time.

THE BEST LAID PLANS OF MICE AND MEN

A complex series of events led to the formation of the new title. Mark Gruenwald had an idea for a book called FANTASTIC FORCE. Sparked by the popularity of the younger supporting cast of FANTASTIC FOUR, Gruenwald's concept would focus on such characters as Franklin and Lyja and, according to Group Editor Ralph Macchio, "be ultra-cool, ultra-hip, and totally nineties."

Intrigued by the idea, Macchio and FF writer Tom DeFalco considered the potential ramifications of a "new" FF, so Gruenwald, Macchio, and DeFalco decided to do a spin-off. FANTASTIC FORCE would not arise from the ashes of FANTASTIC FOUR, but would be *inspired* by the original team—to become the Marvel Universe's next generation of adventurers and explorers.

All agreed that the new team should comprise characters closely tied to the rich FF mythology; Wakandans, Atlanteans, The Inhumans, Skrulls, and denizens of the Savage Land—all were considered for inclusion. A team led by the Black Panther and consisting of Franklin, Lyja, the android Dragon Man, and the Inhumans Gorgon and Karnak was originally entertained.

The impetus behind the team would be simple. T'Challa—The Black Panther—would perceive a void in the world created by the breakup of The Fantastic Four. The world needs a team of explorers to investigate the unknown and anticipate threats to Earth from places such as the Negative Zone, he would decide, and with the vast riches of his native Wakanda at his disposal, he would form just such a team.

A meeting was set up including Macchio, Gruenwald, and DeFalco in a brainstorming session to discuss the project. Some concerns were expressed about the team—it

"The characters have be
eye toward the tension

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was tough to reconcile why The Black Panther would finance such a project. After all, T'Challa is the king of Wakanda, a nation whose power derives from its natural resource vibranium. The Black Panther would not venture his kingdom's future on such a project without getting something equally valuable in return. Also, The Black Panther was thought *too good* to confine as a background character.

een put together with an and the chemistry—"

A similar concern arose with Gorgon and Karnak—why would they suddenly decide to leave their people after so many years? Wouldn't they have departed sooner? And where would Dragon Man fit in?

Macchio explained what was at the heart of these problems. "Any of the *really good* Marvel concepts have some sort of tragic overtones associated with them, whether it's Spider-Man and the death of his uncle, Iron Man's heart condition, or Daredevil's blindness. There was always something tragic about the character.

"It wasn't just that the hero put on a costume and fought crime. There was an underlying reason for why he did it," he concluded.

It was suggested that they center the emerging team around Franklin. After all, what could be more tragic than the loss of one's father? Franklin, torn from his home when he was a child, returned in his mid-teens. Thus, he never got to know his father, yet his last impression as a member of his family was that of a youngster looking up in adoration at his male parent.

Franklin's longing to know his father will lead him to carry on in Reed Richard's footsteps. Although only sixteen years old, Franklin has the intelligence of the ages, born of time travel. He will decide to seek out individuals like himself, young adults who are outcasts and want to become a part of something that will provide a means to their discovering themselves. The team decided to create new characters who would fit this description yet still be a part of Fantastic Four mythology.

WAKANDANS, ATLANTEANS, INHUMANS, OH MY!

The team that took form was comprised of Psi-Lord, Vibraxas, Kismet, Huntara, and the still-forming Inhuman character.

The Wakandan called Vibraxas was created by Mark Gruenwald (writer of CAPTAIN AMERICA and QUASAR). Caught in an accident during an experiment involving both Wakandan and Antarctic Vibranium, Vibraxas has gained the properties of both these com-

pounds. These powers will make him an outcast within the tribe, so The Black Panther will send him to Franklin—along with a lump sum of money to finance his new team. It remains to be seen whether this is to be considered a bribe to take Vibraxas, or simply a goodwill gesture.

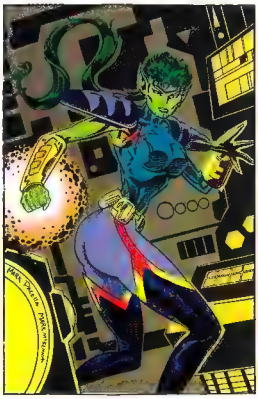
Kismet learns of Franklin's new team and actively seeks him out to join. Although physically an adult, this artificially grown woman (originally known as "Her") is mentally only two years of age, yet nigh-omnipotent. She feels she has nowhere else to go and begs Franklin to include her. The editorial team predicted that female readers are initially likely to find Kismet annoying because of her insipid and fawning behavior, but Group Editor Ralph Macchio promised that her character will quickly develop out of this phase.

Huntara, a warrior from the future who is actually (through a strange set of circumstances) Franklin's aunt, wants *nothing* to do with the team, yet is likely to appear to play a pivotal role during their first adventure, and she will continue to follow the team thereafter in order to protect her nephew. From what she is safeguarding him, and for whom she is working remain mysteries.

The creative group considered including the Atlantean shapeshifter Proteus, who first appeared in the pages of the SUB-MARINER limited series, but in the final cut they rejected his inclusion for several reasons. Because he is an Atlantean, there would always be the nagging problem of his breathing on land, and they feared readers might confuse this Proteus with the better known villain of the same name who has fought The X-Men. Also, since he was a shape-shifter, they felt he would be too much like Lyja, who was also eventually removed from the roster because she was too closely tied to Johnny Storm (The Human Torch).

Although FANTASTIC FORCE will not actually be formed within the pages of FANTASTIC FOUR, the necessity of its concept will be set up by Franklin at the end of FANTASTIC FOUR #392. Early plans—still in the formative stage at press time—call for the first issue of the new title to focus on Franklin's active recruitment for members. One scenario being considered, Macchio revealed, is for Franklin to lead the fledgling group into the Negative Zone. Dedicated readers may remember that, when Sue Richards was pregnant with Franklin (in FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL #5), Reed, Johnny, and Ben had to travel to that bizarre universe to acquire Annihilus's cosmic control rod, because only the particular energy that the rod supplied could allow Sue to give birth safely. "Franklin almost feels like he's going home," Macchio explained. "A little bit of poignancy there for the first issue..."

Although most of their time will be spent with exploring, the team's New York base of operations will be the Four Freedoms Plaza, the Fantastic Four's headquarters. The Thing—the one member from the original team who has been most willing to give Franklin a chance to prove himself—is also most willing to be involved as mentor and sounding board when the teen needs a voice of experience. Of course, the question arises of what will happen between the two groups when and if The Fantastic Four becomes whole again. Macchio commented, "We really haven't determined that yet, because the group dynamics [of both teams] will be in flux for months to come."



"The sense of awe will be palpable—"

"Of course, the cosmic aspect of the series will be a mainstay. These people will explore the universe and the mysteries of creation," Macchio continued. "The sense of awe will be palpable—a whole new level of cosmic menace will be introduced, as well, and the very wellsprings of the Marvel Universe will open for our perusal. And this will add to the comic's nascent identity."

Editor Mike Rockwitz echoed Macchio's thoughts on the direction of FANTASTIC FORCE. "I don't want it to just be, 'Well, let's see what the kids can do with the parents' villains,'" he explained. "I want them to have their own set of villains, their own 'Dr. Dooms.' I don't want it to be another cliche. 'Well. here we go into the Negative Zone,' so the first thing you see is Annihilus or Blastaar the Living Bomb Burst.

"I'd like it to be a fun book, like the old FF," Rockwitz continued. "You read the first page for a recap to explain what the team is all about; then they're off on their mission, and you learn about them as you read about them. None of this, 'Well, he's really a soul rapist that has come back from thirty years ago in another form.' I can't get into that stuff. I like basic comics—a beginning, middle, and an end in one issue, perhaps a subplot thrown in for good measure."

BACK TO THE FUTURE

FANTASTIC FORCE will be a title at the heart of the Marvel Universe and, Macchio empha-

MIKE GUSTOVICH: CHARACTERS FROM SCRATCH

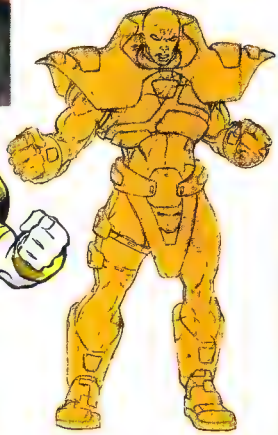
Artist Mike Gustovich feels that he does his best character designing while he is actually in the process of working, when he doesn't do sketches beforehand. "I feel that my sketches are weak," he remarked candidly, "but if you let me design or do a concept from scratch, it turns out much better."

According to Gustovich, there are two important factors when determining the appearance of a new character. First and most important is the character's personality, followed by his/her powers.

The character Vibraxas—a citizen of an African nation—posed a particular challenge. "I want him to look Wakandan, but not stereotypical," Gustovich explained. "In comics, you cannot do a black person without indicating a darker skin color or certain facial features. It's just a way of communicating, although that is not the way it is in real life."

Gustovich also saw the task of developing Vibraxas's costume to be a challenge to his artistic skills. "I must somehow indicate that he originates from a jungle kingdom that lives alongside a high-tech atmosphere."

"...if you let me design or do a concept from scratch, it turns out much better."



Constantly thinking and rethinking where these considerations might lead his design, Gustovich was adamant about not having Vibraxas go barefoot, as he felt that would be too stereotypical. He further revealed that he had been using books with illustrations of old African tribal shields as references for design ideas. This was leading him in specific directions—"perhaps something similar to a loincloth only neither metal nor cloth," he concluded.

On this page: Artist Mike Gustovich **(top)** prepared a number of preliminary concept sketches (two of which are reproduced here) for the character Vibraxis, before he settled on the final design for the new Wakandan hero and his costume **(center, inked).**

BATMAN PUNISHER GOTHAM KNIGHTS

Their legends both were born of great personal tragedy.

They both dwell in back alleys, creatures more of the dark than the sunlight — *noir*-inspired vigilantes rather than bright spandex super heroes.

Indeed, both have been dubbed "urban vigilantes" as often as heroes. Ultimately, they are two tough guys relying upon instinct and intellect rather than super powers to battle a never ending war against crime.

Yet they are different. The Punisher believes the only way to vanquish crime is to blow away the bad guy. The Batman fights hard, but believes the war against crime can still be won without killing.

"The difference between them is the age each was when he experienced his trauma," offered Chuck Dixon, regular writer of **PUNISHER** and DC's *Detective Comics* and *Robin*. Batman was a child; The Punisher was an adult. The Batman's not a guy to play around with, but there is a moral duality he feels as the warden of Gotham. He's there to protect the city. The Punisher's just there for payback."

Working with two of comics' most legendary crimefighters on a monthly basis for years, Dixon said he couldn't help but muse about the logic and possibilities of a meeting. Just over a year ago, he posed the concept to both Don Daley, his editor at Marvel, and Dennis O'Neil, his editor at DC, and they, too, were excited. After all, no Marvel character had set foot in the DC universe for more than 10 years — since *Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man* (April 1976) and the X-Men teamed up with the Teen Titans back in 1982.

"My criterion for a crossover is, 'well, if this character with whom my character was going to cross over didn't pre-exist and a freelancer brought him in and proposed him as an ally

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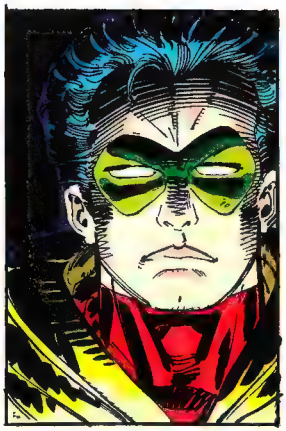
or antagonist of my hero, would it be a logical mix?'" O'Neil said. "Would I buy that story if it were submitted to me cold? The Punisher is a very, very good antagonist for *both* versions of Batman, so I had no problems with it."

Undaunted by the fact that Marvel and DC are meant to be comics' greatest competitors, Daley and O'Neil pitched the concept to publishers Mike Hobson (Marvel) and Paul Levitz (DC) and found both their superiors eager to work together again. In Daley's words, "no technical, legal, or corporate problems" came up, so this summer The Punisher will go to Gotham City not once, but *twice*.

First up in June from DC Comics comes *Batman/Punisher: Lake of Fire*, a 48-page prestige format one-shot penned by Batman Group Editor and writer O'Neil, penciled by Barry Kitson (*Legends of the Dark Knight, Adventures of Superman*), inked by James Pascoe (*L.E.G.I.O.N. '94*), and edited by a current DC staffer more than well-versed in both the Marvel and DC universes — Archie Goodwin. Then, in August, Marvel Comics presents **PUNISHER/BATMAN: DEADLY KNIGHTS**, a 48-page, offset format, $4.95 one-shot written by Chuck Dixon, edited by **PUNISHER** Group Editor Don Daley, inked by Klaus Janson (*Batman/Spawn: War Devil*) and penciled by perhaps the most popular artist in comics to have *never* drawn Batman — John Romita, Jr.

To make matters even more interesting, O'Neil indicated that The Punisher *may* or *may not* be meeting the traditional DC Batman. While some might think that a non-Bruce Wayne Batman would be less interesting to readers, the timing of the crossover could not have come at a more perfect point, he added. With events rapidly coming to a head in the bat-corner of the DC universe, will The Punisher meet current Batman, Jean-Paul Valley (Azrael), or Bruce Wayne? At press time, none of the creators involved would go on the record with an answer.

For those who haven't been keeping up with the current DC continuity, about a year ago, Bruce Wayne suffered a serious back injury in a battle with a villain called Bane and handed the batcape to a younger man — Valley — whose code of ethics is guided by the tenets of Azrael, a quasi-religious force representing good against evil in a *very* black-and-white dichotomy.



"Jean-Paul is interesting because his obsessions are very different from [those of] Bruce Wayne or The Punisher," O'Neil noted. "[He is] driven essentially by simple revenge. With The Punisher, the revenge motive is right up in front. With Batman, it's sublimated but always present. Without the murder of Thomas and Martha Wayne, there wouldn't be a Batman. With Jean-Paul, it's very different. He's operating under forces that he himself does not understand. He thinks he is operating out of religious conviction, and I hope it's becoming apparent that that's not true."

"It's similar to when we pulled Steve Rogers out of the Captain America suit when he resigned," Daley noted. "Now DC has taken Bruce Wayne out of the Bat suit and replaced him with what seems to be a very troubled wannabe."

Everyone involved in the two-book project did confirm that they would avoid delivering standard stories with time-worn crossover-structure cliches. For one thing, according to the writers, in neither story do The Punisher and Batman punch it out for several pages. "Batman has no time for The Punisher," Dixon said, "He views him as as much of a threat to Gotham as Jigsaw or The Joker. [Batman and The Punisher] never ally against the common enemy. It becomes a cat-and-mouse game between all the characters with Batman as the only real hero. He wants to get this whole crowd either behind bars or *out* of Gotham City."

Dixon also promised a twist at the end calculated to surprise readers. "Batman has to compromise his principles enormously at the end of the story, but there's never a handshake."

Both one-shots will be self-contained stories, with the linking element being Jigsaw's quest for new crime opportunities in Gotham City, and The Punisher tracking him onto Batman's turf. O'Neil won't guarantee whether or not Jigsaw will be teaming with a DC villain in his book, but in the Marvel installment, according to Dixon, The Punisher learns that Jigsaw never left Gotham, and is building a crime empire there with the aid of none other than The Joker.

"When I first figured that I wanted to do **BATMAN/PUNISHER** several years ago, The Joker was an integral part of it because The Punisher meeting The Joker is almost more fascinating than The Punisher meeting Batman," Dixon said. "You've got these two characters who are both certifiable. Used to Batman, The Joker expects fair play from the heroes he meets. The Punisher is *anything* but a hero. You always want to see The Joker, who's so damned self-assured, knocked down a peg. If The Joker were in The Punisher's book over at Marvel, he wouldn't have lasted more than

"The Punisher coming back to Gotham is ruining Jigsaw's day."

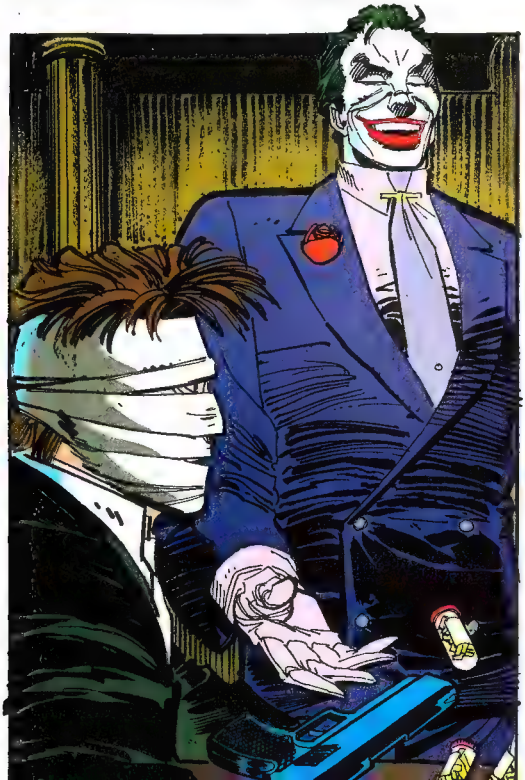
three issues. The Punisher simply would have killed him."

If a Joker-Punisher conflict delights Dixon, both Daley and O'Neil see a certain symmetry in pitting Jigsaw against The Batman. "Jigsaw would make a fine Batman villain," O'Neil said. "He reminds me of a lot of them, particularly of Two-Face — a very human character but one that is grotesque. It's an old, old trick — exterior to mirror interior."

What separates Jigsaw from The Joker is that Jigsaw knows all too well that The Punisher operates within none of Batman's moral boundaries. He is called Jigsaw because his horribly scarred face looks like a jigsaw puzzle, and the man who made it that way is none other than Frank Castle — The Punisher. In another of Dixon's twists, The Joker not only offers Jigsaw a chance at sharing a crime empire, but hooks him up with a plastic surgeon who repairs that damage.

"The Punisher coming back to Gotham is ruining Jigsaw's day," Daley said with a chuckle. "He's got a new face, but it's up to readers to guess what his face will look like when the bandages come off, and how long that face will last with The Punisher around."

"The difference between them is the age each was when he experienced his trauma."



Originally Dixon had planned to use Kingpin instead of Jigsaw, but Marvel continuity issues intervened. "I had to readjust the story with Jigsaw and The Joker," he noted. "My story changed pretty much 100 percent, but the themes that I wanted to deal with still came out the same."

Beyond the bad guys, other Batman co-stars will appear only fleetingly in the crossover. For example, even though he writes *Robin*, Dixon said that he just didn't feel Batman's younger sidekick really fit into a tale involving The Punisher. "It's simply Robin and Micro Chip meeting on the Internet on the computer and not knowing who each other is," he said.

While The Batman and The Punisher dislike each other, and Robin and Micro Chip remain strangers, Dixon found himself on a team that included a lot of friends and colleagues. "When we had a conference between the Marvel and DC people, I felt like the girl everyone's dated," he commented. "They didn't know each other as well as I knew everybody."

Dixon referred to a "Batman/Punisher" summit organized last fall to create initial plot parameters for the crossover. It was held in a 34th Street hotel room, bringing together the team of writers, editors and assistant editors working on both characters. "We vowed we wouldn't come out until we had a good story," Daley recalled. "We got a *great* story."

This teaming renewed another long-time acquaintanceship — Don Daley cut his teeth as O'Neil's assistant editor at Marvel some nine years ago, before O'Neil moved to DC to become the seminal Batman writer/editor guiding the Dark Knight through his '80s renaissance.

When O'Neil decided to write the DC installment, he asked Archie

Goodwin to step in as editor. Goodwin has not only edited *Batman* on and off for decades, and currently edits *Legends of the Dark Knight*, but he also edited the Mike Zeck–Steve Grant Punisher graphic novel "Return to Big Nothing" and wrote "at least one" Punisher storyline in the 1970s, he noted.

Once the teams were in place, according to Goodwin, it's just been a matter of "phone calls, faxes, Fed Ex, and at least one lunch. We exchange material. We keep each other up to date on where the books are at so that [each editor] sees scripts, pencils, and inks as the other does it and vice versa."

Each editor/writer team also had an ideal artist for the project. "If I were a fan, what would have me salivating is seeing John Romita, Jr. let loose in the DC universe," Don Daley declared. "John does [*Batman* movie art director] Anton Furst's Gotham City. His Joker is especially Romita-esque. You look at him, and he couldn't be drawn by anyone else."

According to Romita, at first he wasn't especially excited about drawing the quintessential Bat villain. "I've always seen him done as such a goofy character with the purple suit and green tie," he admitted. "So I cleared it with Archie and put him into a kind of Armani, very serious suit. He's still got the horrible face, and I make him look very evil. I got the chance to do him the way that I wanted to do him, and [DC] didn't mind."

For Romita, the greatest pleasure, though, was drawing in the style that, through his work on Daredevil and Punisher titles, has become both his signature and his favorite — *noir*. Normally, he said 48 pages would take him five weeks, but he estimates that he will devote eight weeks to this book.

"[Noir] seems to be my strength," he said. "I love it. Here I am with another character who has no particular powers and a dark look to him. Gotham City basically is New York City with a different name, but it's got the same kind of gothic structures. What I really enjoyed was showing the characters in realistic street scenes and rooftop scenes and back alleys. I guess I fit the mold. I wouldn't care if all comics turned into gangster comics again. It would be a blast.

"I'm really having fun and knocking myself out," he declared.

Archie Goodwin added that he also has "always been very curious to see how John Romita, Jr., would handle Batman." At the same time, Goodwin is "totally delighted" with the artist for the DC side of the story. "The nice thing about working with a writer like Denny and an artist like Barry is they're really seasoned, accomplished professionals," Goodwin said.

The Barry Kitson/James Pascoe cover to *Batman/Punisher: Lake of Fire*.

He added that James Pascoe was Kitson's choice for inker. "Barry worked with James on a Superman job and had expressed an interest in having him as an inker. As an editor, you want your art team to be happy and compatible, so I went along with the idea."

When Daley described Klaus Janson's contribution, he spoke enthusiastically about "the amount of black" and added, "Klaus is inventing new textures in this job."

"It's kind of like being a baseball player and knowing you have a great pitcher in front of you," Romita added. "You tend to be comfortable, you relax, and you do the work. If I have a bad day one day, a headache, I know Klaus'll take care of business."

Would these editors and writers like to see more Marvel-DC collaborations? "A lot of us who work on various DC and Marvel characters have always hoped there would be more crossovers, and Batman and Punisher seemed like a really good combination," Goodwin expressed. "In bull sessions with comics professionals from time to time, the idea of a crossover like this happening someday was something we'd say, 'oh, gee, that'd be neat if it could happen.'"

Indeed, Dixon vowed he would happily write a crossover every month if he could come up with enough good reasons to throw the two characters together. "If we were writing The Hulk and The Flash, I wouldn't have pushed for a crossover, but these two characters were destined to meet. And it's going to be a great story. The story virtually wrote itself because Batman is the classic DC character and The Punisher is the classic Marvel character."

It's a back-to-school

MARVEL AGE SWEEPSTAKES

Send a completed questionnaire—or an exact facsimile (the *same* size as the original) to:

Marvel Age Sweepstakes • Marvel Comics, 387 Park Ave. South
New York, NY 10016

You may win one of *seventeen* hot prizes.

Two winners receive the FANTASTIC FIRSTS hardcover leather-bound edition in its own slip-case—from *Marvel Limited.*

Five Winners get a photocopy of the story sketches *and* script for the PUNISHER MEETS ARCHIE (including the original, unedited version), signed by writer Batton Lash!

Five winners take home a hardcover Simon & Kirby BOYS' RANCH collection, signed by Joe Simon.

Five winners receive a hardcover Simon & Kirby FIGHTING AMERICAN collection, signed by Joe Simon.

ARCHIE is a registered trademark of Archie Comics Publications.

[Marvel Age #139]

Name: _____

Street Address: _____ Apartment: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Age: _____ Phone #: _____

What influences your decision in buying a comic?

- ❑ The art
- ❑ The stories
- ❑ Enhancements
- ❑ Character guest-shots
- ❑ A particular writer
- ❑ A particular artist
- ❑ Eye-catching cover
- ❑ Crossovers
- ❑ Comic shop employee recommendations
- ❑ Other: _____

Do you buy the same titles each month?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No
- ❑ If No, why not? _____

Why did you buy this issue of MARVEL AGE?

- ❑ Batman/Punisher cover
- ❑ Fantastic Force cover
- ❑ Articles on comics
- ❑ Articles on movie/TV
- ❑ Articles on trading cards
- ❑ This sweepstakes
- ❑ Other: _____

What articles did you read?

- ❑ Up Front
- ❑ Maximum Carnage
- ❑ Batman/Punisher
- ❑ X-Men Toys
- ❑ Mark's Remarks
- ❑ Letters
- ❑ Stan's Soapbox
- ❑ Movie Roundup
- ❑ Sweepstakes
- ❑ Phalanx Covenant
- ❑ Fleer
- ❑ Checklist

Copy or cut along dotted line

All entries must be postmarked no later than September 1, 1994, and must be received no later than September 15, 1994. No purchase is necessary, and there is a limit of **one entry per person.** Employees of the Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. and their family members are not eligible to participate. Winners will be chosen by random drawing, and all winners will be notified by first class mail no later than November 1, 1994. This sweepstakes is sponsored by Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. For a list of winners, send a self-addressed-stamped-envelope to the above address. Requests for a list of winners must be received by October 1, 1994. Allow four weeks for delivery.

THE NEW X-MEN ACTION FIGURES

PLAYING THE PART

The soon-to-be-released toys based on THE X-MEN bring new meaning to the phrase "get in the game." During the months of July and August alone, the Toy Biz toy company plans to release no fewer than a *dozen* new action figures and play sets designed to break down the barriers between the action found in comic books, that's seen on TV, and the excitement acted out in the playroom.

THE ACTION PHILOSOPHY

Comics, television, and toys — all three media can provide entertainment and escape, but nothing compares to the hands on "world building" that comes with a toy.

Last year Marvel firmly established relations with the toy world by purchasing a percentage of Toy Biz, Inc. The Marvel team at Toy Biz is headed by Avi Arad, CEO and Pres. of Marvel Film and part owner of Toy Biz, Anne Pitrone, V-P of research and Development, JoAnn McLaughlin, Director of Research and Development, and Ron McArdle, Creative Director of Marvel Product.

Toy Biz's desire to put the emphasis on the "action" in the "action figure" has led that company's designers to strive for a new level of playability for the summer *X-Men* and *X-Force* releases. The primary producers of Marvel toy and action figure offshoots, Toy Biz is no stranger to comic book-based toys, having designed several different lines of five-inch Marvel action figures over the past few years. However, a reaffirmation of some basic design philosophies, along with a burgeoning respect for the source material and a fiery synergy among all those involved in the toys' creation, promises to lift the newest line additions to the *X-Men* line head and shoulders above anything previously produced, according to Ron McArdle, Creative Director of Marvel Products at Toy Biz and co-X-Men toy designer.

He explained the initial thinking that went into the new line's design. "Our basic philosophy is to take the essence of each character and couple it with the best artistic spins of the character, as shown in the comics and on the FOX-TV *X-Men* animated series. When we do an action figure, we want to capture the dynamic majesty of the character along with the heroic (or villainous) strength he or she displays. And we want to be true to the character as it is portrayed in the source material."

THE DIE IS CAST

This basic design philosophy has allowed Toy Biz to produce action figures that capture the mystery behind Gambit's eyes and the unfettered savagery of Wolverine's claws. However, it is a lengthy process to transport a character from the comic book page to the toy store shelf. The trip may start at the designer's concept table, but there are still a lot of steps to be taken before the toy is actually cast.

"After deciding with Marvel which characters and toy concepts we want to do," McArdle continued, "Marvel contacts freelance comic book artists to sketch out definitive interpretations of the character. While that is happening, we sit down and do several concept drawings. A mechanism drawing is where we actually work

The Toy Biz catalog distributed at the 1994 Toy Fair offered an *uncanny* number of new releases in the line of X-Men related toys and action figures, such as those seen here.

out what the feature will be for the action figure — will it have a power punch, a super kick, throwable weapons, etc. After the particular action is decided upon, the designs are turned over to a 'control artist' who figures out what needs to be done to make the toy actually work. The control artist also considers saftety factors; they make sure that missiles don't launch with enough force to injure, and insure safe, fun play. . ."

Once this on-paper design work is completed, the drawings and diagrams are given to a sculptor, who will give form and substance to all of the varied input. "The sculptor starts in clay. His/her primary task is to capture the essence behind the character, not just the form that it represents. Also, the sculptor needs to allow for clearance or room for the action work. To do this, they don't just sculpt the figure whole from one block of clay and then break the limbs and insert pins into the joints. Instead, the sculptor forms each limb separately but maintains a total look and posture. This results in a better looking, more fluidly moving final product."

Above: Toy Biz Research and Development Director **JoAnn McLaughlin,** on hand at Toy Fair to offer the retailers her insights into the 1994 *X-Men* releases, occasionally took time to hang out with the mutant experts such as the one pictured here. Photos by Anna Harper

Right: At Toy Biz's showroom for Toy Fair in New York, **Ron McArdle,** Creative Director for Marvel Product, explained the workings of the new *X-Men* toys, including the Sentinel figure with hollowed out chest (to store captured mutants) and collapsible legs (for when he is defeated). **Below:** The many buyers carefully studied these mutant additions to the toy lines they carry in their stores.

After the clay sculpture is completed, the sculptor creates a master mold by surrounding the original figure with a latex polymer which, when it hardens, is cut away, leaving an imprint of the original sculpture. This mold is filled with either wax or paraffin to create a new solid, duplicate sculpture. Since the wax is softer, it is easier to make fine-tuning adjustments to the figure. After approvals by Marvel and internally, a resin "pattern" casting is made,

"Our basic philosophy is to take the essence of each character and couple it with the best artistic spins..."

which will be used as the prototype from which machine tools are cut for the production of each individual figure.

While the figure is being minted, Toy Biz is busy designing each action figure's package, putting into each package the same care and respect that went into designing the figure itself, thus making sure that the toy is properly presented to the public.

The same design philosophies and manufacturing expertise goes into every type of toy produced, whether it be a five-inch figure, a ten-inch figure, a vehicle, or play set. Quality, according to McArdle, is everyone's goal. Along with creating a toy that's loads of fun, he added.

SUMMER X-TOY RELEASES

Twelve 5-inch action figures, six ten-inch figures, the *Blackbird Jet Playset*, and a duo of two-character action figure packs lead the releases for July and August.:

July:
ACTION FIGURES (Five-inch):
- Beast — with Mutant Flipping Power
- Cable — with Air Assault Flying Action
- Shatterstar — with Dual Slashing Sword
- Silver Samurai — with Vac-metal Samurai Armor & Sword
- Morph — with Interchangeable Multiple Faces
- Rictor — with Seismic Shockwave Action
- Random — with Missile Blasting Arm
- Fitzroy — with Futuristic Crystal Armor
- Sunspot — with Explosive Power Punch
- Quark — with Two Fisted Quick Draw Action
- Pyro — with Flame Thrower
- Robot Wolverine — with two Robotic Arm Weapons

Suggested Retail for each figure: $5.99. Produced by Toy Biz

- **BLACKBIRD JET PLAYSET:**

The Blackbird Jet has been a mainstay of both the **X-MEN** comic book and the animated TV show. This sleek jet is used for transportation, reconnaissance, and if the need arises, aerial combat. The body of **BLACKBIRD JET PLAYSET** can be separated into three distinct action areas: the cockpit becomes a three-wheeled control center; the fuselage turns into a instrument laden command post complete with swing-out command chair, mutant tracking console, and twin missile pods; and the tail section transforms into a personal glider equipped with an

emergency eject seat. When fully assembled, the whole playset measure 16-1/2" and can seat three action figures.

Suggested Retail: $29.99. Produced by Toy Biz.

Also available in July is a new Horizon Models vinyl model kit featuring Sabretooth. Horizon plans to follow up the Sabretooth release with models of Rogue, Bishop, and Gambit, scheduled to be in stores late summer/early fall. And to round out the July X-Men toy bonanza is a *Sabertooth vs. Wolverine Electric Race Car* set from world-famous race track makers Tyco.

August:
ACTION FIGURES (Ten-inch):
- Apocalypse
- Weapon X (Wolverine)
- Cable
- Shatterstar
- Beast
- Cain (Weapon X)

Suggested Retail Price: $12.99. Produced by Toy Biz

Also in August, fans can expect several *X-Men Action Figure Twin Packs* to hit certain retail chains on an exclusive distribution basis. The first such pack planned will appear in Kay Bee Toy Stores around the country and will contain a five-inch Maverick figure with Quick Draw Action, as well as an unannounced mystery figure. A second, as yet undetermined retail chain will have a twin pack containing a mystery figure and a five-inch Mojo action figure (with "Wild Whipping Tail").

According to Toy Biz's Director of Research and Development JoAnne McLaughlin, these exclusive distribution packages will only serve to heighten the popularity surrounding the *X-Men* line of toys. "We have certain retail accounts that cater to a wider buying audience than might just go looking for a toy at the local store or at a convention," McLaughlin noted. "By putting special toys into those stores, we expand the number of people exposed to the X-Men, generating new customers for us and for the store. Most important of all, it generates a new fan."

• And what does the future hold for the X-Men and the toy line based on them? According to Ron McArdle, "[Toy Biz] really overwhelmed people this last year with the expansion of our toy line, not only in the number of action figures but in the new variety of toys we produced. And I mean 'overwhelmed' in a good sense. Our rapid expansion and elevated quality level caught people off-guard. And you can bet we'll be pushing the envelope even further, especially in the new types of toys we'll design."

– *Jerry A. Novick*

Countdown to GENERATION X

GENERATION X is shaping up to be one of the hottest new series of the year, but before it hits the stands, as they say, you need to walk before you run, "rock" before you "roll", and in this case, check out the three-way "Phalanx Covenant". This series of three simultaneous X-crossovers races through July and August and forms the prelude to September's **GENERATION X #1.**

GENERATION NEXT

UNCANNY X-MEN #316 & 317
X-MEN #36 & 37

The first of the "Phalanx" crossovers kicks off when Banshee discovers he's home alone. . .but not really. The stuff hits the fan when the Beast, Storm, Gambit and Bishop turn out to be part of The Phalanx, that growing, evolving, techno-organism first seen in **UNCANNY X-MEN #312.**

Banshee finds that the phony "PhalanX-Men" have been rifling through Xavier's files, and he deduces that they have targeted several young mutants for termination! Banshee must face the grim facts that it is up to him and Jubilee — along with Sabretooth and White Queen — to escape The Phalanx, and find and defend the targeted mutants.

The crash and bang climax of "Gen-Next" takes place in a police precinct house in St. Louis with an all-out mutant/Phalanx brawl. But will Banshee and crew be in time to save the child mutants? And will Sabretooth and White Queen remain loyal to their temporary alliance?

LIFE SIGNS

X-FACTOR #106
X-FORCE #38
EXCALIBUR #82

This is the meat of "The Phalanx Covenant". Members of X-Factor, X-Force, and Excalibur seek a haven from The Phalanx on Le Mont St. Francis, where (with the help of Prof. X) they regroup and plan an assault. The half-human, half-Phalanx mutate that was Doug Ramsey (now "Douglock") is causing conflict among the members of these groups, especially with Rahne, who believes deep down that Doug's consciousness is still intact. Forge discovers that Douglock's brain imprints unlock the secret origins of The Phalanx and their true purpose, but turnabout is fair play; Douglock sends a techno-spike through Forge's mind. As Forge becomes "technoized", he and Douglock burrow deep into the earth, taking Wolfsbane and Cannonball with them!

The team is whisked away to what appears to be a quaint little European town. Forge realizes that the town itself is alive, part of the Phalanx, and he comes to the conclusion that this is a young and evolving life form that should be allowed to survive. The four X-Men are led to a giant structure that Forge discovers to be a beacon — The Phalanx are planning to summon their entire race to Earth!

Douglock is seized to be used as more techno-fodder for the Phalanx. Betrayed by his Phalanx brethren, he and Sam and Rahne plan to destroy the beacon from the inside.

THE FINAL SANCTION

WOLVERINE #85
CABLE #16

Cyclops, Phoenix, and Wolverine meet on Muir Isle, preparing to launch a mission to rescue their captured teammates. When they are attacked by the techno-circuitry present there, Cable arrives to even up the odds, and he and Jean devise a plan — using his newly discovered, techno-organic half to distract the Phalanx while Cyclops and Wolverine try to locate the missing X-Men. But there is great risk that Cable may not be able to break free of The Phalanx once he becomes infested.

In the conclusion, the search for the imprisoned X-Men leads Wolvie, Cable, Scott, Jean and Cyclops to the Phalanx Womb. Stephen Lang (the focus of the Collective Intellect of The Phalanx) is trying unsuccessfully to incorporate Psylocke's mutant makeup into The Phalanx. Cable and Psylocke team up to short circuit The Phalanx.

So there's plenty of homework to do before **GENERATION X** makes its debut. There will be a quiz.

- *Tom Dante*

Mark's REMARKS

I've been writing comic books for sixteen years now, and I have kept every single fan letter I have gotten since the dawn of my career, all filed in manila envelopes with the title and issue the letters address, printed in the upper right hand corner. I've been doing "Mark's Remarks" in some form since 1984 and, while my column hasn't been as big a mail-getter as my stories (unless I — *ulp* — write about breaking into the industry), I also keep all *that* mail.

Since this feature in **MARVEL AGE** is soon to reach its end, I thought I would devote my second last column to the highlights from all of the remarks my columns have elicited. You'll have to excuse the savage way I'm extracting readers' comments out of context — I'm trying to cover a lot of ground.

And away we go . . .

"I have chosen today to write my farewell letter. I think reading 'Mark's Remarks' in **MARVEL AGE #79** convinced me that today would be the day. I've come to realize my relationship with Marvel is like a bad marriage, and I've been hanging around thinking things would get better. I realize now that it's not," writes Michael Holguin, Rowland Hts., CA. You know, Michael, your letter, written in 1989, is not the first I've ever gotten from someone telling me they've outgrown our comics. Not only does every single comic book have the possibility of being someone's first, so might any be someone's last. People must stop reading our books every day or else, with every year, our readership base would only increase. In point of fact, it fluctuates slowly. I'm sorry you're no longer reading us, and hope someday we'll capture your fancy again.

"In **MARVEL AGE #111**, you mentioned that the aspiring artists put too many tangents on panel borders. Out of curiosity, I checked out a few current comics, and noticed many professional artists drawing tangents. And you know what? I never noticed them before. They never affected my enjoyment of the story. Now, of course, they'll be the only thing I notice," writes Augie DeBlieck, Jr. of North Haledon, NJ. Sorry about that, Augie. So I'm like the wise guy sitting next to you in the movie theater who explains how they did the special effects instead of just sitting back and enjoying the picture. Sheesh.

"What are the odds of two or more artists breaking into the industry as a team? I have been told that my page layouts show good storytelling but I need to work more on my finished art. On the other hand, there is an artist at my college whose art is more developed than mine but lacks storytelling skills. Could we break into the business together?" asks Danny DeAngelo of DeLand, FL. It's possible, Danny, but rare. Ian Akin and Brian Garvey used to ink as a team (and would never tell me who did what) and while I can think of layout/finished pencil teams, I can't think of any who "broke in" that way.

"I compare the comix business to one of those trendy discos where the music's loud and awful, the drinks are watered, and the people are obnoxious, but you grovel before the doorman to get in because you think when you're in, you can convince yourself you're really important. Mr. Gruenwald and Marvel remind me of the kind of people you find in those discos," writes Michael Pickens of Newark, OH. Interesting metaphor, Michael. I take it I'm not the one playing the music, watering down the drinks, or letting grovelers in the door, I'm one of those obnoxious types enjoying the music, drinking the drinks, and groveling before doormen? Just checking.

"The problem with killing off heroes is that they are almost always resurrected, and that's something that ticks me off. Comics are fantasy, but resurrection stretches credibility a bit too far. I've made a policy that if a title resurrects a character, I quit buying that title. I don't mind seeing a character return from an ambiguous death — but resurrection is a serious no-no," writes Jeff Lacasse of Lompoc, CA. I agree with you, Jeff. I feel that we comic writers have devaluated the dramatic impact of death by having our characters cheat it so often. Archivist Peter Sanderson estimates that more than half of the people who appeared in the **1987 OFFICIAL HANDBOOK** "Book of the Dead" no longer qualify for it. The only character I recall bringing back in all my years of writing is the Red Skull. Even then I had qualms.

"I wholeheartedly agree with you, that if a character dies, he/she should stay dead. If you ever bring back Bucky, I'll come to the Marvel offices and spit on you," writes Will Mason of Carrollton, GA. I vow, Will, that as long as I'm writer on **CAP**, I will not incur your saliva.

"There is no reason to kill off any character. If you don't like the character, the simple solution is for you to not use him/her. There's a good chance that the reason you don't like the character is because you screwed him up in the first place. Death in comics has become a crutch, a method of boosting sales used by writers who are too incompetent to find some real ways to boost sales," writes Jeff Melton of Wilmington, NC. Missives like yours, Jeff, caused me to rethink my position on trimming the "dead wood" of the Marvel Universe. I now believe that the only "good" death in comics is one that generates new storyline developments (like Snapdragon's alleged death has done for Diamondback) rather than eliminates them.

"Why don't you call your column 'Mark My Words'? or perhaps 'Before You Die, I'll Tell You. . .'?" writes Ed Bloemendaal of Dallas, TX. Hmm. Thanks, Ed, you've just given me the title and subtitle of my autobiography!

"The best way for a reader to edit comics is with the almighty wallet; if he doesn't like what's going on, he stops buying the comic. End of story. I've used this method myself from time to time. Clearly readers are reactive editors rather than proactive editors like you and Raif," writes Alan M. Dionne of Rockville, MD. The flipside of this "you readers are the true editors" paradigm is I tell our editors that they are the designated readers for the titles they edit, representing the interests of the majority of the cash-paying customers out there. I love reciprocity.

"In recent Marvel books, the U.S. and Canadian Governments have been shown in a poor light. Many readers think that the parts in comic books corresponding to real life are, in fact, realistic. For their sakes, you should show that the government does work for them not against them," writes Stephen Weinberg. Stephen went on to support his

"Comics are fantasy, but resurrection stretches credibility a bit too far."

observation with five instances of governmental obstruction culled from then-recent books. I agree with you that, ever since the 70's, the government has been depicted unfavorably more times than not. The reason, I imagine, is that if the government weren't in conflict with our heroes, it wouldn't warrant being included in the first place. My objection to it goes beyond the inaccuracy; government-as-evil has become a comic book cliché.

"To survive, Marvel Comics needs to make a profit on its titles. But at this juncture of time, it is almost impossible to collect all the titles you would like. In a business sense, the opportunity to make money from more titles must be taken, but this is often at the expense of the reader who wants to read more, but can't afford it. Does this situation bother you at all?" asks Saleem Ashraf of Middlesbrough, England. Sure it does, Saleem. In my collector days, I could barely afford to get all the Marvel line and there was but a quarter as many as there are today. But look at it from Marvel's business perspective — comic book stores have finite shelf space. If Marvel puts out one title, we will get a far smaller portion of that shelf space than if we put out 100. To have a "presence" in a store, we figure we have to put out a certain quantity of title, and if you didn't have to choose between two of our titles, you'd be choosing between one of ours and one of somebody else's.

"In **MARVEL AGE #103**, you presented the results of a poll of the paranormal you conducted among the ranks of Marvel's staff. However, you didn't expand on your personal feelings on the various questions you posed," writes Michael J. Jones of Bensalem, PA. I did that on purpose, Michael. I felt I should spare my reading public my pompous view that what most people believe about the supernatural is too mundane for my tastes.

"Here's something I'd like you to write about in a future "Mark's Remarks." What if the comics depicted violence more realistically? The point needs to be made that violence is sickening and destructive, and by sanitizing it, we are defeating ourselves by making violence seem safe and even fun," writes Phil Girvan of Bangor, Northern Island. I agree with you, Phil, that we should see the ramifications of a violent act, but I have a problem with the acts themselves being shown more sickeningly or graphically. What sickens and disgusts one person may actually tantalize and amuse another. In this case, we would be turning off large groups of people while titillating the perversities of smaller groups of people. That strikes

me as being as irresponsible as glorifying and sanitizing it.

"Marvel's 'treatment' of fandom is primarily aimed at the young. Just look at your Bullpen Bulletins, letters pages, **MARVEL AGE**, and various press releases. It gives me a feeling that either you treat readers like morons who enjoy silly jokes or you don't treat readers seriously at all," writes Leslie Lee of Singapore. Well, I can't speak for every syllable ever written by the "Voice of Marvel," but I *can* tell you that it's been Marvel's intent from Stan on down to have fun and treat readers like the discriminating, intelligent bunch of folk they are. Part of that is letting them share the jokes and assuming they're smart enough to "get" them. Not every joke we make will be a knee-slapper, but we hope we can at least get across the spirit of fun that goes into our mags.

"Just read your column in **MARVEL AGE** on Cap's attitude toward flag-burning. I thought you handled the subject beautifully. It was as tough a topic as one could find to write about. Virtually any comments would be sure to anger somebody. Yet you did it smoothly, candidly and intelligently. If Marvel ever publishes a newspaper, I suggest you apply for the job of editorial writer," writes Stan Lee of Los Angeles, CA. Stan Lee!?! *The* Stan Lee!?! Folks, having written more than a few fan letters to Stan in my day, it made my decade to have him return the favor with a praiseworthy note.

In all, it seems my column stirred up plenty of ideas in its run. And for my money, ideas are what make the world so interesting.

- *Mark Gruenwald*

FLEER

MARVEL UNIVERSE: The next generation

This August Fleer continues to unveil their premiere Marvel trading card outings with *Fleer Marvel Universe 94*. This 200 card offering will feature all of the major characters and events that have impacted Marvel storylines of today and future plots not yet hatched. This set also features 16 limited edition cards, including holograms, foil stamped cards, and limited edition animation sericels.

According to Bill Jemas of Fleer, the emphasis here will be on *innovation* — new designs, new ideas, new energy. *Fleer Marvel Universe Card* buyers will find striking pencil and ink art created especially for the set by some of Marvel's most talented illustrators. The lineup reads like a list of "who's hot" in comics today: Andy (X-MEN) Kubert, Adam (WOLVERINE) Kubert, and X-MEN 2099's Ron Lim, Darick (NEW WARRIORS) Robertson, and Gary (HULK) Frank — to name just a few. Plus, there will be several artists working on the set (for example, Bill Sienkiewicz and George Pèrez) who currently lend their talents primarily to special projects such as posters, comics limited series, and trading card products.

The text on the redesigned card backs will contain vital information about the characters, teams, or events depicted (who they are, why they're important, the role they play in the Marvel Universe, etc.), and the individual character cards will sport newly updated "Power Ratings". This will help fans better place their favorite characters in the Marvel pecking order based on six "Power Ratings": strength, intelligence, speed, stamina, agility, and fighting ability. Each "Character Card" will reveal an important "Moment of Truth" in the hero's or villain's life — that pivotal point in time that changed the character forever, or an incident when the individual was pushed to his or her personal limits and forced to find a new way to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Finally, this will be the first *Marvel Universe* set to be produced with inlaid gold foil enhancements of certain key design elements, further setting these cards apart from previous *Universe* packages. The *Marvel Universe Cards* will be packaged in standard trading card foil packs — ten cards per pack, 36 packs to a box.

THE MARVEL UNIVERSE CARDS

The 200 core cards of *Fleer Marvel Universe* will include:

- 109 Single Character cards
- 81 Famous Battles Cards (breaking down into nine different 9 card thematic sets)
- 9 Freeze Frame Cards (hand drawn characters set against a photo-realistic background)
- 1 Checklist Card

Plus, there will be three separate chase card sets:

- 4 Holograms
- 6 Animation Sericel cards
- 6 foil-enhanced cards

FLAIR MARVEL '94 UPDATE

Within the set of 150 innovatively computer-enhanced *Flair Marvel '94 Cards* released this month by Fleer, there will be eighteen special "chase cards". These will be available in the standard packs and boxes of *Flair Marvel '94*, but are produced in extremely limited quantities. Each of these cards will be done in Fleer's "Power Blast" format; full-color art printed with metallic color inks that have been laced with actual metal foil (a process called "spectra-etching"). To further enhance the design, the art will appear twice on each card — the front will be a vertical spectra-etched "Power Blast" image, while the back will contain a horizontal, conventionally rendered blow-up of the picture which will show the intricate detail of the art.

The 18 "Power Blast" cards of *Flair Marvel '94* are:

Dark Phoenix
Storm
Spider-Man
Wolverine
Thor
Punisher
Iron Man
Magneto
Venom
Captain America
Deadpool
Ghost Rider
Cable
Doctor Doom
Gambit
Silver Surfer
Invisible Woman
Mister Fantastic

1) Call mom collect

Send your letters to: MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE, c/o Marvel Comics Group, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. Attention, correspondents: All letters to be considered for publication must include your complete name and address, though we will gladly withhold that info on request!

This month's lengthy letter column title comes to us from our old pal David Hutchinson of Austin, TX. Thanks, David! We've got a lot of letters to get through and only one more letters column before MARVEL

2) Wash hair

AGE takes its final bow, so let's get right to them, shall we?

Dear Marvel Comics (or whomever it may concern),

I was going through some old comics when I came across an old MARVEL AGE (April, 1993) and. . . *Gasp!* How could I have missed it?!

I may have missed my chance to get my own fashionable, goes-with-anything Bossmen pin. If you still have any (and I hope you do), please send me one.

Oh, I wish I had something clever to say.

Josh Logan
P.O. Box 383
Grand Coulee, WA 99133

You don't have to say anything clever, Josh. You'll get your pin anyway!

Bossmen-turned BEAVIS AND BUTTHEAD artist Rick Parker assured us that he still has a bunch of Bossmen buttons left. You should have received yours by the time you read this.

In fact, if anyone else out there wants one of these must-have, collectors-item pins, you can write to Rick c/o Marvel Comics, and he'll be happy to send one along. Supplies are limited, though, so act quickly. (Also, it probably would be helpful if you include a self-addressed, stamped envelope with your letter. We don't want to push the guy's generosity too far.) And remember, *one to a customer!*

Of course, it wouldn't push our generosity at all if you were to ask to see our LETTER OF THE MONTH! Just like always, we've dug deep into our mountain of mail to pull out a couple of letters that we think will be of particular interest to Marvelites hither and yon. So we'd be overjoyed to share them with you, even if you didn't beg and plead . . .too much.

This time around, we've chosen a couple of letters that we think will strike a chord with anyone whose favorite hero is no more.

Dear MARVEL AGE,

I am writing this because I don't know where else to write. Where is Slapstick? Is he part of the normal, ongoing Marvel Universe, and will he be having his own book again?

Chris Akin
1514 Jamerson Landing
Marietta, GA 30066

Dear MARVEL AGE,

I don't know who this letter would go to, but **MARVEL AGE** is as good a place as any. This letter concerns the She-Hulk. I am casting my vote for her to come back. However, I think she should come back as the *Savage She-Hulk*, with Jen changing uncontrollably into the She-Hulk. The way it was, her book was awful. A person who has more than half the Hulk's strength should not have such stupid stories. Besides, the way the series ended, she should have been savage.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

3) Sort sock drawer

Matthew Willence
9315 Avenue N
Brooklyn, NY 11236

Yes, Chris, Slapstick does indeed live in the regular Marvel Universe, which is why he was able to meet Captain America, Ghost Rider, The Avengers, and a whole mess of other heroes during his four-issue limited series.

You'll be happy to know that Slapstick will soon make his triumphant return! He's scheduled to

4) Write a letter to MARVEL AGE

appear with the New Warriors in an upcoming serial in MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS.

As far as the larger question that both of you guys raise — namely, how to get new series for your favorite heroes — well, you're already on the right track. We passed the question along to Bobbie Chase (who's edited both SLAPSTICK and SHE-HULK in her day), and Bobbie said the best way to request a new comics series is to write a letter to *Editor-in-Chief Tom DeFalco*. If Tom gets enough letters from enough people, then it could pay off. As we've always said, you're our real bosses.

Bobbie also suggested another possible route: writing to MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS and requesting new serials starring your faves. It's often easier to get a serial published than a whole new series, and a wildly popular MCP serial can always lead to a series of its own. Give it a shot, and good luck!

Dear Sirs,

I probably won't have much time to write you in the near future because some major career and other changes will occupy my time. I've been a loyal Marvel fan through the 1970s and 1980s, especially of **THE AVENGERS** and the X-titles. I think you'll agree with me that these comics and all of Marveldom are at a turning point or a watershed in facing the competition, a new generation of readers, and new developments in characters. Of course, you have always had this dilemma and that's what makes it all so exciting for you to work on and for us to follow. I'm pleased at the "clean slate" you seem to have created in revolutionary plot and title changes. I hope you make the most of these changes and keep the traditions you've worked so hard to establish in recent years.

I read **X-MEN #30**, with the wedding of Scott and Jean, as well as the final issues of **WEST COAST AVENGERS** and **ALPHA FLIGHT**. I wonder if many of our favorite Marvel characters will be put on a back burner to make room for newer ones like Cable, the Punisher, and the New Warriors. I do like these characters, but I just hate to see the great ones of the past lost. The deaths of Illyana Rasputin, The Multiple Man, and Mastermind seemed unnecessary to me, even though the Legacy Virus storyline was advanced. Also, what will become of Scott and Jean, Colossus, Wolverine, all of Alpha Flight, The Fantastic Four, Thor, and others? It seems they're all in limbo!

I think you get my point, and I'm sure you'll reconsider anymore of these characters' retirements. I've already had to deal with the loss of

Michael Jordan at home (I live in Chicago's northwest suburbs)!

I would like to end on a happy note of congratulations on last year's best stuff. Kudos to the X-Men/Avengers Genosha Saga, the marriage of Cyclops and Jean Grey, the new era of villains and team line-ups, and even Saturday morning TV exposure to developments in the X-titles, not to mention (in my opinion) the greatest opportunity in years to restructure Marvel. When I get a chance, I will be watching for developments in my favorite Marvel titles.

Tom Gebarowski
1812 Stika La.
Mt. Prospect, IL 60056

Never fear, Tom! It's certainly true that the last couple of years have seen the debuts of lots of new heroes and villains. But that doesn't mean we'd turn our backs on our old favorites. We love these characters as much as you do, and we wouldn't want to lose them.

Even among the characters you mention, many of these heroes have been through some exciting times lately. With the wedding of Cyclops and Jean Grey (and their subsequent limited series), all the shake-ups in The Fantastic Four, Wolverine's coping with the loss of his healing factor and adamantium bones, and Thor's recent bout with madness, we don't think you could say that any of them are standing *still*. And that's not even counting things like the last few month's developments in DAREDEVIL and the Spider-titles, or the reforming of the West Coast Avengers as the Force Works.

So we hope you'll stick around to see what happens. And when you can find the time, please drop us a line and let us know what you think about them. There's an awful lot on the way, and we'd hate for you to miss it!

See you in our next. . .and *last*. . .issue.

checklist

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The first of Marvel's new Disney manthies

HYPERKIND UNLEASHED #1 2.95
Will the team surrender their powers?

JUSTICE: 1.75

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Guest-starring the Thing & the Yancy Street Gang

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The Disney classic comes to Marvel.

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The mysterious hero really does star.

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84 pages from the villain's perspective

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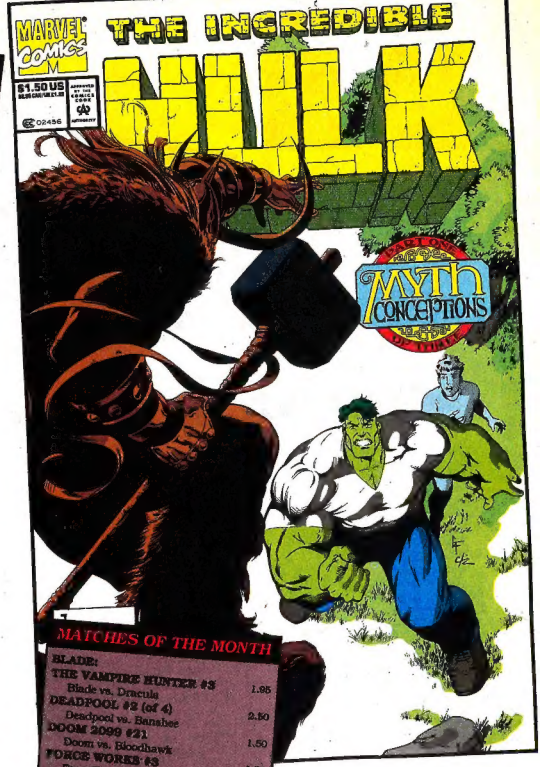

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The team unites to fight Phalanx.
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With foil-stamped covers

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The team seeks to rescue a new generation of mutants.
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Phalanx hunts down the new generation of mutants.

Final Sanction

48 pages, foil-stamped covers

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Wolverine, Phoenix, & Cyclops search for the missing X-Men.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
CLASSIC CLASH #8	THE BLACK PANTHER VS. THE INHUMANS DAREDEVIL #7				HAPPY BIRTHDAY SAM SPRINGLE SVEN LARSEN 1	2
20 YEARS AGO: ENTER THE GREEN GOBLIN SPIDER-MAN #14	ASHLEY WELLS JAMES BRENNAN 4 INDEPENDENCE DAY	5	SARRA MOSSOFF ERIC FEIN 6	HELEN ARROYO 7	JAMES JACOVIDES 8	VIRGINIA ROMITA CRAIG ANDERSON TERRY KAVANAGH 9
	SUZI LEE 11	ROBERT LOSEY 12	TOM PALMER MADELINE JORDAN 13	14	JACK ABEL JOHNNY GREENE 15	MARTI SILBER 16
	ROBERT TORO 18	MARGARET TRUJILLO MIKE MAIER 19	ANGIE STEPHANINI GLORIA BIRULIN 20	JAMES WILSON CHIU CHEE CHAN MARILYN ADAMS 21	MIKE ROCKWITZ MILLIE SHURIFF 22	KELLEY JONES ANDREA GOLDBERG MIKE VOSBURG SAM BISBEE 23
GLORIA ENGERMAN 24	ROBERT LAZZARA VITO INCORVAIA	HARRY CANDELARIO ALBERTO CONCEPCION	**DAN CARR** ERNIE CHAN CHRISTINE SLUSARZ	30 YEARS AGO **ZEMO** AND HIS **MASTERS OF EVIL** PREMIERE IN **AVENGERS #6**		
LARRY ROHLFING CRAIG McWILLIAMS 31 ARNOLD BEHRMAN	25	26	27			

MARVEL Age
139
AUGUST 1994
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FANTASTIC FORCE ...the series
DIRECT EDITION